Godman (J. D.)

MONITIONS

TO THE

STUDENTS OF MEDICINE.

A LECTURE

INTRODUCTORY TO THE COURSE

DELIVERED IN THE

PHILADELPHIA ANATOMICAL ROOMS,

SESSION OF 1824–5.

BY JOHN D. GODMAN, M. D.

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At a meeting of the gentlemen composing the class attending Dr. J. D. GODMAN's Course of Lectures on Anatomy, held Dec. 18th, 1824, Anson Brookes was called to the Chair, and Philip M. Price, appointed Secretary: The following resolutions were unanimously adopted:—

Resolved, That a committee of three be appointed to wait on Dr. Godman and request a copy of his Introductory Lecture to the present course, for publication.

Resolved, That if this application should be successful, the same committee be instructed to take measures for having the lecture published in an appropriate form. Whereupon, Benjamin Franklin Doswell, Isaac W. Hughes, and William B. Fahnestock, were appointed to carry the foregoing resolutions into effect.

ANSON BROOKES, *Chairman*,

P. M. PRICE, *Secretary*.

MONITIONS

TO THE

STUDENTS OF MEDICINE.

A LECTURE, &c.

THE arrival of this season when we are to commence an arduous course of study, gives rise to a variety of interesting reflections, and one of the most pleasing is produced by witnessing the spirit and zeal evinced by your eagerness to seek instruction at every accessible source. Those who are to be engaged in teaching cannot perceive this, without anticipating much gratification from the performance of their duties, since the disposition to acquire, promises to be as active and energetic as the willingness to impart the advantages of experience and knowledge, and instead of looking with apprehension or indifference on our future labours, they are to be hailed with pleasure, as offering an ample reward of improvement and satisfaction both to the pupil and teacher.

With the intention and nature of Introductory Lectures you are, generally, well acquainted. They may be compared to the discussions of the state of the weather, which serve as an universal beginning to casual acquaintances, and may lead to other subjects of deeper interest, when there is assimilation of character or reciprocity of sentiment—without which the acquaintance will prove as fleeting as the clouds that provoked the conversation. Intro-

ductory Lectures may be considered as a hospitable welcome at the threshold, but can give us no idea of the nature or zest of the entertainment we are afterwards to receive. This is especially the case with those who profess to teach by *demonstration*, from no other notes than those furnished by the nature of their subjects. The qualifications of such teachers cannot be fairly judged from a written discourse, however discreetly pronounced, however fervid and elegant may be its diction; however correct and forcible it may be in expression. Such a discourse may appeal to the imagination, and give a new impulse to ever active fancy, or it may fix the attention on reflections of serious importance—but *demonstration* has a life and charm that addresses both the eye and ear, she calls on reason to examine and store up her relation of facts, and enables the judgment to deduce therefrom invaluable principles of thought and action.

Since our present Lecture cannot be demonstrative, I shall take the liberty of addressing myself to those who are about to enter on the study of a difficult and honourable profession, in the hope of making my experience useful to them in pursuing the objects they have in view.

The importance and dignity of the medical profession have been felt and acknowledged in all ages and in every country, whether civilized or savage, because the severity of pain and dread of death have been coeval and co-extensive with the human race. Celsus has correctly remarked that no period can be assigned when the art of medicine did not exist. Unfortunately for us, the perfection of our science is neither in proportion to its age nor to the revolutions it has undergone. Yet this liability to change both in doctrines and practice is rapidly diminishing, as the diffusion of knowledge is promoted and extended by a more

correct study of nature. The charge of being a conjectural art must at no distant period cease to be applicable, and the resources of our science know neither limit nor circumscription—if all who engage in its cultivation be properly zealous in their exertions, and true to the trusts they assume.

It is therefore all-important that we who are about to begin our professional career, should set out with correct ideas of the most advantageous course to be pursued in search of professional distinction, now that medicine is placed on a basis of the broadest and fairest character, and the value of medical talent is becoming more generally understood. To lose time by misdirected application, is an evil—but to acquire deep-rooted and injurious prejudices relative to our science is an almost irretrievable mischief, of whose magnitude we can scarcely form an idea.

The circumstances determining many of us to adopt a particular profession are seldom to be recollected. The choice is frequently the result of accident, sometimes of caprice, and occasionally of necessity. Hence, many of us set forth before we have had an opportunity of inquiring to what point our path is to lead—what difficulties may impede our progress, or what qualifications are necessary to our success. We are often fairly embarked, and return is no longer possible, before we discover the true nature of our enterprize, and though we then see how slenderly we are appointed for so hazardous a voyage, we can do nothing but make the best of our situation. The accidental adoption of a profession would perhaps be of little disadvantage, could we be informed of the best course to pursue, or able to assume constancy and industry enough to surmount the difficulties that must present. Our knowledge often comes too late, except to convince us that much time has been lost and many efforts made in vain.

The science of medicine is vast, almost beyond the first conception of any man: it comprises almost all the branches of natural science directly or collaterally, and he who writes himself Doctor in medicine, tells us by implication, that he is at least possessed of the general principles of many sciences, each of which is individually comprehensive enough to require more than the life time of one man to grasp its particulars. If we confine ourselves to the departments strictly called medical, we shall find even in them, an amount of knowledge collected which we dare not hope to appropriate to ourselves. Anatomy, Surgery, Therapeutics, Obstetrics, Chemistry, &c. excite in our minds ideas of long-continued and severe study, even for obtaining their elements, and we see the venerated teachers of our University growing old in the study of a single branch, without ever imagining or pretending that they have explored the whole of the field they have so ardently and assiduously cultivated. These circumstances are neither mentioned to inspire dread nor deter from exertion, but to place in stronger light the necessity there is that you should be thoroughly aware of what you are pledged to attempt and perform, and to incite you to advance, by advising you of the means that will most conduce to your success.

We will commence by inquiring what it is you are expected to accomplish during the period of your noviciate; what circumstances are necessary to full and lasting success. The great object of your preparatory studies is to acquire a sufficient stock of knowledge to make it safe that you should be allowed to study in the great school of experience. In other words, that you should gain such an acquaintance with the facts and principles on which your art is founded, as will justify the proper tribunal in placing your names on the roll of those who may without in-

jury to society become responsible for the lives and happiness of your fellow creatures. This is all you can do as mere students—it is all that is asked of you—and that it is not always performed is often owing to a want of a proper acquaintance with the nature of the task to be accomplished. The study of medicine should be regarded as a selection and examination of facts, with a view to the deduction of general principles of action—not as an effort to accumulate materials for the mere purpose of aggregation. To know that the pulse is produced by the contractions of the heart—that the arteries are the vessels in which pulsations occur, and that these vessels are always to be found in a certain situation, would be of slight importance, did it not furnish us with means of deciding in many difficult cases on the most efficacious treatment —and frequently enable us to disappoint inexorable death of his prey, when accident has invited his approach.

The first great mistake of the medical student usually follows his eagerness to grasp all the particulars of knowledge properly pertaining to his profession. He begins by loading his memory with details, instead of improving his judgment to examine the value and bearings of the general rules proper to each section, or common to the whole. His exclusive attention to a particular segment of the circle is not felt to be incorrect until a considerable advance is made, and a fondness acquired for a particular department, in which alone the material still seems inexhaustible, and the space to be traversed boundless, though many other equally important branches are to be studied. A violent and hurried effort is then made to effect what patience and steadiness alone can accomplish, and the most common consequence is, that the memory is exclusively relied on without reference to any other end than the performance of

a task. It thus often happens, that he who properly directed, would have looked forward to the honors of his profession, as a reward merited by his application, too often receives them in uncertainty and dread for correct answers to questions that may prove nothing but the strength of his memory, and be forgotten long before their importance is felt or understood. Were every student well informed of the exact character of the acquisitions he is to make during his noviciate, the condition would be very different from that just referred to. To learn *all* that is known in *all* the branches of medical education is impossible in the very nature of things, but to become acquainted with their elements or outlines is in every man's power. This is the knowledge you are to gain—not the ability to answer every question that may or can be asked, and the man who has applied himself to the study of the leading facts of each department, and learned to deduce from them the rules by which his professional conduct should be governed, is able to show that he is qualified to perform all the duties pertaining to his profession. In honouring such a man with a degree, a benefit is conferred on the science and on his country.

It would give me great happiness to prevent you from falling into a common error relative to the great objects for which a student of medicine is to strive. If we were to ask what is his great aim, many would reply, the attainment of his Degree. Now, though the degree has its specific value, it is as an evidence of previous industry—and actual acquirements—not as having any intrinsic value, separately considered. The possession of a degree does not impart talent—nor does it prove that the possessor has talent—nor is more than ordinary intelligence indispensable to the attainment of this honour in any institution, through-

out the world. Correct deportment—an observance of the proper forms, and a certain diligent attention, will insure a degree to the plainest and most middling genius. Proofs of this are at all times before your eyes—and should convince you that the terrors of examination can only be such, to those who have mispent their time or misapplied their industry.

A degree merely, is not, and should not be, the chief good of a student who comes to a great institution in a large city. His efforts should be strenuously made to gain knowledge, to fill his mind with the treasures placed within his reach, and exert his industry in the way that will best fit him for the discharge of the high and responsible duties of his profession. The opportunities presented to you at this period of your lives, can rarely, if ever, be enjoyed a second time. When about to begin the practice of medicine, most of you must remove to distant situations, where there are few books to consult, and still fewer professional friends. Little will it avail either in relieving your patients or consoling you for loss of reputation produced by neglect of opportunities, to be able to say you have procured a degree. But if the student acts under a proper conviction of his duties, and determines to use the ample opportunities spread within his reach, the degree follows as a matter of course—and is proffered to him with as much readiness as he can have to receive it—and with this enhancement of value—it is then a substance, not a form—an honour deserved, not inherited—a testimonial of high character, and not an empty title. Such a degree confers as much honour on the givers, as it does on those who receive it—and the success of such graduates is regarded by the institution with the same pleasure that a parent looks on a favourite child, whose generous emulation and noble

deeds promise to give lustre to all who have been concerned in the development of his character.

One admirable advantage you would gain from a correct appreciation of the objects that ought to command your efforts, and the reward you should propose to yourselves, would be, the removal of those perturbing anxieties that arise when the period of examination approaches. I pretend not to say it would banish all solicitude—for that feeling is inseparable from modest and ingenuous youth in such a situation—but it would extinguish fear and eternally silence the suggestions that are sometimes made of the possibility of partiality in our public tribunals, of personal feelings being allowed to influence their decisions—or of private passion being permitted to produce public injustice.* A moment's

* Among other circumstances of a somewhat similar character, the students of medicine have frequently expressed apprehensions of provoking the displeasure of the PROFESSORS, by attending the lectures or dissections of teachers not holding offices in the University, and notwithstanding the manifest absurdity of such fears, many have thought it most *prudent* to take a dissecting ticket in the University, although they have freely expressed their desire to dissect elsewhere.

The examinations of the University are for the purpose of ascertaining how much candidates have learned, and not precisely in what place they have studied, provided the regulations of the school have been observed. It is entirely optional with students whether they study *Practical Anatomy* in the University or not, so that they do study it;—and there is no obligation expressed or implied, that they shall learn to dissect in any particular place or under any individual. In fact, the right of the student to decide who shall be his instructor in Practical Anatomy, is as great and secure as his right to select his place of abode, or to choose his own room-mate; interference with either would be considered in the same light and produce similar results.

The statement of the folly of such apprehensions would be unnecessary, were the students of medicine when they first arrive in the city properly acquainted with the candour and liberality of the justly distinguished gentleman who has charge of the department of Practical Anatomy in the University.

reflection will be sufficient to prevent you from listening to insinuations so degrading to the mind capable of believing them. It is impossible that men, selected solemnly to decide on the fitness of candidates for a distinguished and honourable office, should allow themselves to be influenced by any other considerations than those of duty and justice. That men thus responsible, should allow pique, anger, or any other ignoble motive, to blast the reputation of one who is just entering on the theatre of life is a supposition too monstrous ever to have been credible, notwithstanding the frequency with which it may have been imagined. But were such a thing *possible*, the general sentiment of public indignation would whelm the perpetrator beneath a world of obloquy, which the strength of Atlas could not sustain—nor the hundred arms of Briareus repel.

Those who are obliged to decide on the acceptance or rejection of candidates, are men who have trodden the same arduous path—have felt all the anxieties you now feel, and endured the same toils that you now undergo. They well know how eagerly the hopes and wishes of friends centre in the candidates, and how deep a wound they must inflict when they declare any one unworthy of the honour to which he aspires. They must unfeignedly rejoice in the success of those who are accepted, and deeply regret the rejection of such as are unqualified. This rejection can only follow their most dispassionate and deliberate conviction of the unfitness of the applicant. Join with me then in treating all such suggestions as the offspring of ignorance or ignobleness, and be deaf to every whisper that would imply unworthiness or degradation in those we are inclined to honour for their talents and high standing; whom we venerate for their justice and integrity; and love for their moral and social worth.

The solicitude felt by those who have been most industrious and attentive to their studies, is not without its salutary influence on the candidates themselves and on those who are in future to become so. It gives the strongest testimony of the high character of the tribunal and of the elevated standard they have fixed as the test of the candidate's fitness. There is no aberration from truth in saying that the qualifications requisite to obtain admission to share the honours of the profession here, would secure the same honours from any institution in the world. Here, the examination does not mean the observance of forms, nor is it necessary for the learner to waste his time in acquiring the facility of talking [*canine*] Latin in order to answer questions that he best understands in his own tongue. The only proofs he has to give are that he has correctly acquired the elements of his art, and is fit to be dismissed to his friends and the world to assume the charge of the health and lives of his fellow creatures.

The University of Pennsylvania, the oldest and most celebrated school in the western world, has derived a great part of her deservedly high reputation from the value she sets on essentials, and the neglect of mere forms. Strength of mind and useful acquirements have ever been valued above mere ornament or abstruse trifling, and in consequence very many of those who have been ushered into the profession under her auspices, have done honour to themselves and their alma mater, no less than they have benefited society at large. It is not possible to believe that any of you could wish that the standard of professional excellence should be lowered here, or that the gates of the profession should be thrown open to any but those who have exhibited the best evidences of their courage and zeal, by their perseverance in ascending that proud emi-

nence on which her portals are erected. You would reflect with sorrow on any change in this respect, and should rather rejoice that the requisites were increased, than hope they will be diminished.

The high standing of our school—her past glory—her present usefulness and splendor, are all additional incentives to your ardour and emulation. By acquiring her degree you become participators in her renown, and related to all the talent and worth she has possessed or sent forth into the world. Secure of the past, and actively zealous for the future, her reputation must daily become more valuable and worthy of your highest veneration. These circumstances properly considered, will show how futile are the notions we sometimes hear, of establishing other institutions in our neighbourhood, which, without foundation—with few resources—and being withal unnecessary—shall at once rival and outshine the great school by which we are taught—and whose character is brightened by the glory of all that is renowned or distinguished in the medical history of our country.*

It is incumbent on you to make the best use of the opportunities afforded by your visit to this city, for many excellent reasons. The respectability and rank of the students of medicine are increasing with the increase of their respect for themselves, and in proportion to their vigorous application to the business of their studies. In-

* In this place we allude to schools erected for the purpose of conferring *professorships*, and *degrees*, and necessarily in direct opposition to the University. Private Lectures in all departments of Medicine are more numerous, useful, and successful, in Philadelphia, and the opportunities given to students are greater than in any other city in the Union. All the Private Lectureships are subsidiary, as they should be, to the University, and have always been much encouraged.

stead of being considered as thoughtless youths, more eager after pleasure than improvement, they are now regarded as serious and laudable young men, desirous of qualifying themselves for usefulness in life, and many of them destined to occupy a conspicuous place in the history of our country. In all parts of the Union we find literary, scientific, and philanthropic institutions founded and continued by members of our profession, and your friends will hope to see the same spirit actuate your conduct. In addition to what is to be expected of you on ordinary occasions, your country must look to you for still higher and more arduous duties—you may be asked to bind up the wounds of those who are injured in her service; on you may fall the care of hundreds, who, far from home and friends, have been maimed and disabled, and all their hopes of earthly aid will rest on you. If you make yourselves the men you ought to be, by rightly using your opportunities, your presence will be looked for as eagerly as the light of the blessed sun, and the dying soldier or sailor, who has no parent, wife nor child to close his eyes, will heave his last breath in blessings for the soothing and consoling attentions of such a friend.

But that you should be distinguished or experience the delight of ministering largely to the happiness of your fellow men, you must begin by laying the most solid foundation, and acquire the knowledge that is to enable you to do honour to your profession, as well as to secure the ornamental additions which will give grace and ease to your manners and conversation. In becoming Students of Medicine you have placed yourselves in a condition of much responsibility, and are pledged to make the most persevering exertions—to display all possible talent, and strive for a distinguished reputation. If you redeem this

pledge you will hasten that era when the title of Student of Medicine will be equally expressive of honourable ambition, elevated feelings, and high moral worth. In this city you cannot want for examples, of what may be attained by a proper exercise of professional talents. *This* has been the field of Rush's greatness and of Wistar's excellence—both as much beloved as honoured—both rising from their determination to improve themselves and benefit their fellow creatures, not only by their speculative doctrines, but by their eloquent and admirable examples. These, and a bright band of kindred worthies have ennobled our profession and enriched humanity, and the mantle dropped in their heavenward flight has been caught and nobly worn, by that universally venerated pupil of the justly renowned Hunter, from whose lips it is our happiness still to receive instruction, and whose glory, in ages to come will prove a high incentive to emulation in the bosom of every student of our science.

Having endeavoured to point out the objects you should have in view—the course to be adopted, and the examples for imitation—let me take the liberty of offering a caution that may save you many unavailing regrets.—We set out in pursuit of professional distinction when the buoyancy of youth and the vigour of imagination lift us over every impediment and break down every barrier. Hope tints the distance with the most glowing and flattering colours, and the mind revels in the delightful anticipations of pleasure, fortune, and renown. A moderate experience in the cold realities of life, proves that we have been dreaming, and teaches that if these good things are ever to be realized, it is only when years of patient endurance have passed, and after the fires of youth have been well nigh expended in the service of our fellow creatures. Accident may

sometimes realize the expectations of youth, but the most universal rule is, that wealth and fame from professional exertion is the slow though sure reward of long labour and persevering industry. This circumstance is of the greatest advantage to society and to our profession, but those who have yielded too much to the dominion of hope and fancy, are frequently so much affected by discovering the truth, as to suffer an entire revulsion of feeling and sink from the most brilliant flights of imagination, to the lowest depths of despair. This despondence is permitted sometimes to prey on the mind until it produces neglect of business or harsh misanthrophy, and the unfortunate sufferer is continually tortured with notions of the ingratitude of mankind —the neglect of merit—the low state of professional character—while he is letting slip the best opportunities to convince himself of the contrary, by efficiently performing those duties his profession enjoins and society requires. Be then prepared to discover that the world yields neither wealth nor distinction except as the price of industry and great deservings. Stop not to consider whether men are ungrateful or merit is neglected—but perform the actions that create a claim to their gratitude—declare your merits by the faithful discharge of your duties—and then you will find it impossible to make any such complaint.

If such were not to be the result, policy would dictate the propriety of concealing our mortification. The voice of repining and discontent is ever painful and offensive to others—and the same men, who warmly sympathize with a noble spirit in misfortune, struggling against fate, and, though broken-hearted, looking calmly on the approach of inevitable distress—despise the creature who is continually vexing their ears with his fruitless and peevish

complaints, and venting his selfish ejaculations against the characters of those who have lived beneath a brighter sky, or have been wafted along by more propitious gales.

Of this you may feel perfectly assured, that really meritorious conduct cannot go entirely unrewarded—neither can the fire of true genius be entirely smothered. The time must come when perseverance in the conscientious discharge of high duties, will secure the remuneration and respect it is entitled to; the mind that has been wrought up by the study of proper objects, and is sustained by a determined enthusiasm to effect great purposes, may for a time be weighed down by poverty or misfortune—but like the giant of ancient fable, its struggles will convulse the superincumbent mass, and eventually shake off every hindrance to its perfect success.

If in offering these considerations to you on the present occasion, I appear diverging too far from the beaten track, I trust you will pardon the zeal that urges me to lay before you what reason and experience induce me to hope may be to your advantage. Being exclusively devoted to the service of those who are engaged in the study of medicine, I may be allowed in some degree to identify my feelings with theirs, and be anxious to spare them suffering no less than to aid them in insuring their success. Whatever defect there may be in manner, there is none in feeling—nor is there the slightest departure from fact in stating—

> "For *you*, ye studious, I strive,
> For *you*, I tame my youth to philosophic cares,
> And grow still paler o'er the midnight lamp."

PHILADELPHIA ANATOMICAL ROOMS.

MEMBERS OF THE CLASS.

1824–25.

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